

Syria and China - A New Pole in the Middle East?

By [Peter Koenig](#) and [Press TV](#)

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Background

Syrian President Bashar Assad is in China on his first visit since the war and foreign-backed insurgency gripped his country some 12 years ago.

Assad arrived in the eastern city of Hangzhou where he will attend the opening ceremony of the Asian Games on Saturday.

He and other foreign leaders will then meet Chinese President Xi Jinping there.

The Syrian president will also travel to Beijing to discuss bilateral issues and China's help to rebuild his war-ravaged country.

Beijing, which has long provided Damascus with diplomatic support, says that Assad's visit will push bilateral relations to a new level. The visit also comes as China expands its engagement in West Asia. This year Beijing brokered a deal that saw Saudi Arabia and Syria agree to restore diplomatic ties and reopen their respective embassies.

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PressTV: Mr. Koenig, what is your take on Mr. Assad's visit to China?

Peter Koenig (PK): This is excellent news. President Bashar Assad's visit to China and his meeting with President Xi Jinping will further strengthen the already good diplomatic relations, as well as cooperation, between the two countries.

China has an outstanding record in expanding diplomacy and Peace initiatives. As you mentioned before, earlier this year Beijing was highly influential in re-establishing diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Syria – a move, paralleled by another Chinese initiative – re-establishing diplomatic relations – and *de facto* peace – between Iran and the Saudis –

and Yemen.

What is important, Mr. Assad's visit will likely lead to enhanced support by China for Syria's defense and possibly reconstruction of western initiated war-destroyed infrastructure.

Since January 2022, Syria is also part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative – a fact that may further enhance China-Syria collaboration, for example, in the field of hydrocarbon exploitation and protection from western theft – especially from the US and Turkey.

President Bashar Assad's visit to China comes at a crucial time, just preceding the coming 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF), planned for *Mid-October 2023 in Beijing*.

Regarding the BRICS – although Syria is not yet a candidate for joining the BRICS – this diplomatic visit by the Syrian President to China may spark a common interest in expanding the BRICS with Syria's presence, during next year's BRICS summit, sponsored by Russia in October 2024.

Overall, as China is expanding her engagement in Western Asia and the Middle East, Syria's diplomatic closeness to China is also enhanced due to Syria's central geographic location bordering Lebanon, Israel, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, and Jordan to the south.

This potentially also makes for an excellent emissary for China in the region.

PressTV: You just mentioned the Chinese diplomatic initiatives to reopen Embassies between Teheran and Riyadh and between Saudi Arabia and Syria. Do you think there is a shift of the Middle East breaking loose from the US-led western hegemony?

PK: Definitely. This is visible in all fronts. Trade relations between Saudi Arabia and China have already grown rapidly before President Xi's diplomatic initiatives in the region, and that in local currencies. In other words, hydrocarbon deals are made in non-dollar currencies, even though the US dollar had been set by the US in the early 1970s as *THE* trading currency for OPEC.

However, a detachment from the west does not happen overnight. The shift will be gradual as the dollar dominance will wane gradually, especially with ever-more countries trading in local currencies rather than in US-dollars which, after WWII was made *de facto* the world trade currency.

In this de-dollarization, it is expected that the BRICS will play a major role. Consequently, it is also important that countries like Syria and Iran – truly interested in de-dollarization – will join the initiatives of China and Russia, as well as the stated goal of the BRICS.

The trend of disengagement from the West of the Global South in general and the Middle East in particular is irreversible. Western dollar-hegemonic “sanctions policies” have done enough harm for sovereign countries to take their destiny into their own decision making.

The East, led by China and Russia, is pursuing a brighter future for social and economic development, one of peace and harmony.

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